

REVIEW OF THE ORAL EXAMINATION

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President of the Board*

At its quarterly meeting on August 18, 2001 in Sacramento, the California Board of Psychology voted to proceed with the rulemaking process to eliminate the oral examination component of the licensing process. This action followed years of review aimed at determining 1) the value of an oral examination and 2) whether the existing oral examination sufficiently complies with sound psychometric principles. The Board relied upon the following sources for input about this important issue:

- Independent Testing Expert: The Board consulted with an international expert in test development for occupational examinations. It was this expert's opinion that the Board's oral examination had significant problems and should not continue to be used as part of the licensing process.
- Internal Testing Expert: The Department of Consumer Affairs relies on the Office of Examination Resources to develop and oversee examinations for licensure for all boards and bureaus. The BOP oral examination has evolved over many years to attempt to produce an examination that does comply with sound psychometric principles. It is the current opinion of the OER that the BOP oral examination does not meet these standards and therefore, should no longer be used for licensing purposes. (See Norman Hertz, PhD letter and attachment of July 3, 2001)
- Focus Groups: The OER conducted two focus groups comprised of approximately 20 psychologists for two days to discuss the value of the oral examination in determining whether candidates are minimally competent to practice psychology. It was the conclusion of these groups that the oral exam did not add value to this process and that eliminating the exam would not present a threat to the health, safety and welfare to the public. (See March 6, 2001 memo and attachment from Norman Hertz, PhD)
- Review of All Psychology Boards in the United States: A review of U.S. psychology licensing boards demonstrates that a majority of boards do not use an oral examination based on practice content areas. There is no indication that the states without an oral exam have any increased enforcement problems arising from incompetent practitioners.

- **Public Forums:** The BOP held public forums in Los Angeles and Sacramento to give people an opportunity to express their opinions and concerns about elimination of the oral examination. Although there was testimony from people who felt strongly that the oral exam should be continued, there were no compelling arguments that suggested that eliminating the examination would present a threat to the health, safety and welfare of the public.
- **Reliability Study Conducted by OER:** The OER conducted a reliability study of the BOP oral examination and determined there were significant problems with the examination.
- **Advice of Legal Counsel:** The Board's Legal Counsel has advised that considering the content of the OER letter and attachment of July 3, 2001, the board would be in a precarious legal position if, with this knowledge, it administered the oral examination again.

The review of the oral examination has been ongoing for many years. The questions asked have led to answers we cannot ignore. After considering the findings of the efforts listed above, especially the recommendations of the OER, the Board's Legal Counsel, and representatives of the Department of Consumer Affairs, the Board has concluded that the oral examination must be eliminated. It is the right thing to do and it is being done in the right way and for the right reasons. It is difficult to make changes that have such strong traditions and professional sentiment. This does not mean that the BOP will not continue to consider other requirements for licensure. In fact, at the same time the oral examination is being eliminated, the BOP is implementing an objective examination on jurisprudence and professional ethics issues. All candidates for licensure will be required to pass this examination before becoming licensed. This computer administered examination will be available to those who qualify on or after 1/1/02. Additionally, the BOP will continue to monitor the consequences of this change in the examination process, and if it is determined that an additional measure is needed somewhere in the licensing process, the board will develop another measure and it will do so in a psychometrically sound and legally defensible way.

As the oral examination is being eliminated, the board is looking at changes in regulations and policies relating to supervised professional experience with the intent of increasing the quality of this vital component of psychologists' training. In following through with the recommendations of the previously mentioned focus groups coordinated by the Office of Examination Resources of the Department of Consumer Affairs, a group of psychologists was convened on Friday, July 20, 2001 to explore possible changes in regulations/policies/practices of supervised professional experience. The participants included a variety of practitioners from University counseling centers, internship directors, mental health centers, mental hospitals and

private practice. The board invited the California Psychological Association to appoint a representative as well as a representative from Division 2 of CPA. The group was facilitated by the board's Vice President, Emil Rodolfa, PhD and myself.

The full day meeting was rich in discussion and ideas. The focus of the meeting was to explore ways to make the SPE experience more meaningful to supervisees while increasing the accountability and competence of supervisors and those they supervise. It was acknowledged that the current methods of evaluating supervisees left much to be desired. Additionally, there was much discussion regarding the lack of training by many supervisors in the art/science/techniques/laws and regulations of supervision.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

There was agreement that three issues should be further explored that might improve the value of SPE and consequently add to the overall competence of those training to be licensed psychologists.

1. Development of a contract to be signed by supervisor and supervisee spelling out the duties of both parties. This would include professional, legal and ethical behaviors that are part and parcel of this important/critical aspect of training that clearly effects the public.
2. Development of a standard evaluative mechanism that will provide meaningful and written feedback at frequent intervals in a variety of categories. This should be a comprehensive evaluation but should not place an increased burden on the time of supervisors.
3. Enhance current regulation regarding the six-hour requirement of training in supervision. The enhancement would require six hours of continuing education in the area of supervision for those psychologists who supervise. It should be further explored to require this during every license renewal for which supervision is being conducted.

We have and will continue to discuss these recommendations with the full board as we proceed. We are grateful to the participants who shared experiences and ideas and we are looking forward to the continuing improvement and evolution of our regulations over time as they pertain to SPE in a way which ensures the quality, competence and safe practice habits of current and future psychologists in California.

All of the documents referenced in my comments are available for review at the board's website (www.psychboard.ca.gov) from under the "Examination Update" button.